

business letter: is a written communication to transmit ideas, concepts, and information from one person to another; to inquire; to perform a specific task such as placing an order. It is more formal than a friendly letter. It should have a margin of at least one inch on all four edges. It is always written on 8½"x11" (or metric equivalent) unlined stationery. The basic format of the business letter includes the following six parts.

1. *the heading* - contains the writer's address and the date. The writer's address, also known as the return address, usually consists of two or three lines. Often a line is skipped between the address and the date. This is always done if the heading is next to the left margin.

Sometimes it may be necessary to include a line after the address and before the date for a phone number, fax number, E-mail address, or something similar.

Example: Acme Explosives, Inc.
100-B Dry Gulch Alley
Lonesome Coyote, AZ 85789
(602) 555-5555

July 14, 1997

It is not necessary to type the return address if you are using stationery with the return address already imprinted. Always include the date.

2. *the inside address* - the address of the person who will be receiving the letter. Make it as complete as possible. Include titles and names if you know them.

This is always on the left margin.

An inside address helps the recipient route the letter properly and can help should the envelope be damaged and the address become unreadable.

Skip a line after the heading for the inside address.

Example: Dr. Calvin Carson
Cross Country Coach
Dept. of Athletics
Colorado Community College at Cripple Creek
Cripple Creek CO 80678

3. *the greeting* - also called the salutation. The greeting in a business letter is always formal and normally begins with the word "Dear". This is followed by a title such as Mr., Mrs., Dr., or a political title.

Use the full name in standard writing unless the person uses an initial as part of his or her name.

Use a first name only if the title is unclear – for example, you are writing to someone named "Leslie"; do not know whether the person is male or female, and there is not a professional label known.

The greeting in a business letter always ends in a colon. Skip a line after the inside address for the greeting.

Examples: George Smith - correct

G. Smith - correct, only in list or address

Robert E. Lee - correct; the initial is fine here because that is the name he used.

4. *the body* - is written as text. A business letter is never handwritten. The first line of each new paragraph should begin as follows:

- modified block – at the left margin
- block – at the left margin
- semiblock – indented 5 spaces

In the body of the text, skip a line between:

the greeting and the body

the paragraphs

the body and the close

5. *the complimentary close* - a short, polite closing that begins with a capital letter and ends with a comma.

The following describes the location of the left edge of the complimentary close for each of the business letter formats:

- semiblock - in the center, at the same column as the heading.
- modified block – in the center, at the same column as the heading.
- block letter - at the left margin.

Skip from one to three spaces, and type in the signature line, the printed name of the person signing the letter.

Sign the name in the space between the close and the signature line, starting at the left edge of the signature line.

Example: Sincerely,

(Signature goes here)

Elisabeth Jackson
Director of Acquisitions

6. *the signature line* – as shown in the above example, skip three lines and type out the name to be signed. A middle initial is customary but not necessary.

The signature line may include a second line for a title, if appropriate. The term "By direction" in the second line means that a superior is authorizing the signer.

The signature should start directly above the first letter of the signature line in the space between the close and the signature line. Use blue or black ink.

Note: Some references indicate that business letters should not contain postscripts. Others cite guidelines for its use.

- A postscript can effectively express an idea that has been deliberately withheld from the body of a letter; stating it at the end gives it a strong emphasis.
- It may also be used to express an afterthought; however, if the afterthought contains something central to the meaning of the letter, the reader may conclude that the letter was badly organized.
- Start the postscript on the second line below the copy notation or the last typed section of the letter.
- Type *PS:* or *PS.* followed by two spaces before the first word of the postscript. It is permissible to omit the abbreviation altogether.
- Use *PPS:* or *PPS.* – or no abbreviation - at the beginning of an additional postscript, and treat this postscript as a separate paragraph.

Example:

PS: Instead of dashing for the airport as soon as the meeting is over, why don't you have dinner and spend the night with us and then go back on Saturday morning?

PPS: Better yet, why don't you bring Joyce with you and plan to stay for the whole weekend?

Business letters may contain optional parts to include the following four notations:

1. subject line – a means of stating what the letter is about. It appears between the salutation and the body of the letter, with one space above and below.

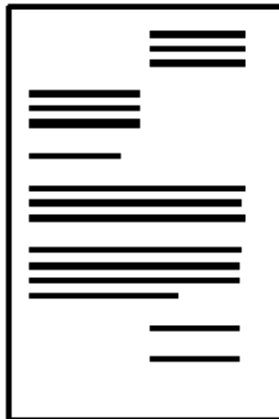
Example: Subject: Your Request for Early Retirement

2. reference initials – are the initials of the typist and sometimes those of the writer; they are placed two spaces below the writer's identification of *the signature line*.

3. enclosure notification – the word “Enclosure” is written below the reference initials, if applicable. It is a reminder that the letter is accompanied by an enclosure.
4. delivery notation – an indication that the letter has been sent a special way. The notation is below the reference initials and enclosure notification, as applicable.
Example: By Federal Express
5. copy notation – lists the names of those who will receive copies of the letter. It is located under the above notations, as applicable.
Example: cc: Miss A. Rossi
 Mr. R. Flynn

The following pictures show what a one-page business letter would look like according to the three accepted styles. The horizontal lines represent lines of type.

Modified Block Style



Block Style



Semiblock Style



<http://englishplus.com/grammar/lettrcont.htm>

Sabin, W. (1995). *The Gregg Reference Manual*. (pp.298-348). NY, NY: McGraw-Hill

Brown, B. W., (2000). Letters, Memorandums, and Miscellaneous Documents. *Successful Technical Writing*. (pp. 243-372). Tinley Park, IL: Goodheart - Wilcox